

Pastoral Musing

May 19, 2020 (St. Dunstan, Bishop and Confessor)

What does it mean to be “Catholic”..?

Even within some Anglican circles, some think being Catholic means being Roman Catholic or Romish. Neither is true. The Roman Catholic Church does not have a patent on the word “catholic.”

To be Catholic is to be part of the Universal Church founded by Jesus Christ, which has maintained the order, doctrine and practice of that Church (Acts 1:13-36 and 2:42).

Though Christ established one Church here on earth, over the years (through sinfulness on all sides) the Church has been divided into four branches: Roman, Anglican, Eastern (Orthodox) and Old Catholic. There are reasons and blame for this which have been debated now for centuries. Seeing that I had no part in any of it, I accept the Church as it is and seek to be in the most faithful branch and limb I can be part of.

At the Reformation, those who left the Roman branch of the Church were the Catholic Church *in* England. The order, doctrine and practice of the Western Catholic Church were retained, while the errors accumulated since the Great Schism were removed. In the first half of the 16th century, English Catholics were “tossed to and fro” by every wind of new order, doctrine and practice coming over from Continental Europe, yet she never lost her footing completely.

The Elizabethan Settlement (1558-59) calmed this sufficiently to allow a distinct Anglo-Catholicism to be defined into the mid-17th century. Eminent theologians like Richard Hooker, great preachers like Lancelot Andrewes, godly bishops like William Laud and pastors like Jeremy Taylor, set Anglo-Catholicism on solid footing. They established a lineage that we still draw upon today.

The most defining era of Anglo-Catholicism was the Oxford Movement in 19th century. Reacting to the politicizing of the English Church, Catholic minded clergy in England wrote tracts and other treatises which more thoroughly defined Anglo-Catholicism. Whereas the Carolines set the English Church on the first five centuries of the Church’s Councils and teacher, the Tractarians set it upon the first eleven without rejecting sound theology and practice after; even if it came from the Roman Church. By the end of that century, Anglo-Catholicism established itself in America (it had been here, primarily in the Northeast).

Since the late 1970’s the Continuing Church, established by the Denver Consecrations in 1978, has been the inheritors and guardians of historic, Anglo-Catholicism. Within the five Continuing Jurisdictions (APA, ACC, DHC, PCK and UEC) the order, doctrine and practice of the Catholic faith initiated in England in 1534, established in the early 17th century and fully defined in the 19th century, lives.

Anglo-Catholicism as lived out within the Continuum rightly has pieces that dove-tail with the other branches of the Church Catholic, yet it is distinctly and thoroughly Catholic in her own right! We, like the Roman Church, are primarily Western-minded, but we are not “quasi-Romans.” Our order, doctrine and practice are fully grounded upon Sacred Scripture and Sacred Tradition (East and West). Our ethos is distinctly English and our worship is thoroughly grounded upon the orthodox, Common Prayer tradition (1549, 1637, 1662 and 1928).

Far from being “schismatics” from Rome or from the Anglican Communion / Episcopal Church, we are the inheritors, restorers and upholders of the Catholic Faith (*de fide*) in the English speaking world. We continue to believe “...the faith once for all delivered unto the saints”; that which has been believed “always, everywhere and by all.” We are Sacramental and Commissional as the early Church was.

Anglo-Catholicism is Catholic in the truest sense of the word. There is no need to define ourselves against Rome or the East. We have proven all things from both branches and hold fast that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Let us not fall into the trap of letting others define us when we know who we are... (Anglo) Catholics.

This is my musing for today. Thanks for reading it.